

Still, in my district and in many of your districts, you can go in and look at the community pharmacist who was on the square. A lot of them had lunch counters. A lot of them had other things. They sold cards and trinkets. What is amazing to me today is I do not want to see through consolidation and corporate work a system that has a fingerprint on the scale, where government has basically allowed this to happen—to start taking away the centerpieces of American squares. When you start taking away the centerpieces of squares and of lots and of communities, both big and small—when you start doing that—then we are part of the problem. It is time we started educating everybody we can.

Do you see that?

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. I do see that.

I want to mention just two things.

First of all, as an American taxpayer, you can imagine my being in business and having what we call “taxation without participation.” Here we have Medicare part D plans that are paid for and supplemented through the government, which I pay taxes to, but my business is not allowed to participate. I am being taxed. I am paying my taxes and am doing what I am supposed to do. It is being used for a plan that excludes my business. How fair is that? I am not asking for anything special. All I am asking for is an even playing field.

Another thing that I want to mention is that I have intentionally not mentioned the names of PBMs. There are some good PBMs, and it is not the company that I have the problem with as much as it is the process and the model. I mean, that is very important to understand—we are talking about the model here—but I will tell you this. There have been numerous instances where companies think they are going to be saving money, and the PBMs have misled them into thinking they are going to save money. Let me tell you that these are some of the most profitable businesses around.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. May I jump in right here?

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Sure.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. You may have heard this.

I agree with you in that there are some great PBMs out there that do work. We are not just saying PBMs in general.

The other thing that bothers me is—and I have heard this from my pharmacist, and you, I know, have experienced this, and we have talked about it, and Mr. LOEBSACK has as well—my pharmacists, my community pharmacists, are scared to say something. They are scared to talk about what is actually going on because they are scared their contracts will get canceled. They are scared that they will get another audit.

I am sorry. I am not a pharmacist. You can't audit me, and I am going to stand here and talk about it for the pharmacists because they can't. That

is wrong. Anybody who wants to say that that is right, I do not understand that; but when you have got pharmacists who are just honest, hard-working people who are trying to run independent businesses and when they are scared to talk about their vendors to work a workable plan, what are we doing here? This should be easy.

Mr. LOEBSACK. It doesn't serve any of us. It certainly doesn't serve any of us in the end, because those folks are the ones who are serving us, and if they are suppressed—if their voices cannot be heard—that stifles competition. It goes back to the market. It stifles competition, and that is not good for any of us in the end.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. When things change and when they say that we can't give input because we are scared, that is just a problem.

We are coming up on our time of closing.

Any last comments, Mr. LOEBSACK?

Mr. LOEBSACK. Yes.

Thank you, Mr. COLLINS. Thanks again for inviting me and Mr. CARTER. I really do appreciate this.

As always, Mr. CARTER, I have learned something tonight from a pharmacist—I always do—and I really appreciate your comments.

I just want to touch upon sort of the issue of the city square. That is so important for so many of our rural districts, as you folks know all too well. It is kind of hard to explain that to our more urban colleagues, but we have to do the best that we can. A pharmacy is so absolutely critical for the economy of a small community. Yes, it is absolutely critical and necessary to serve the population in the area, but it is important for the economy as well.

We have a pharmacy—Mahaska Drug in Oskaloosa, Iowa. It is off the square a little bit, but it is such an important institution in its own right. Every Christmas, they have wonderful decorations, and they have things to sell for Christmas. I mean, people come to depend upon them to do the kinds of things they have done in providing not just the pharmacy services but other things as well. If they were to go under as a pharmacy, I am not at all sure that they would survive, and that community would suffer as a result. Folks' choices would be lessened. Their tradition would be hurt. It would be a disaster in many ways for so many of our local communities if those pharmacies were to close down.

I, for one, am with you. I am not willing to accept that. I am going to fight as hard as I possibly can with you, and we are going to do it together, holding hands across the aisle, which, as you know, doesn't get done a lot around here; but when we can come together, I think it is important for us to do that. So thanks again for organizing this tonight. I appreciate it.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. Mr. CARTER, would you like to add just a couple of things?

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. I will very quickly.

First of all, again, I want to thank you, Representative COLLINS and my colleagues—all of you—for participating in this. This has been a great exercise.

Among my proudest possessions are the plaques that the baseball teams give you every year whenever you sponsor a team, and I have got a wall that is just filled with them. Patients come in all the time. “There I am. I played ball. That was the team I was on,” and they point toward it. It was the Carter's Pharmacy team.

I want to ask you: How many PBMs have you seen sponsoring Little League Baseball teams? I mean, seriously.

Folks, we are talking about something that is essential to our communities, and this is a dire situation. I am telling you. If this is not fixed soon, you are going to see a whole profession of community pharmacies going by the wayside. This is a matter of survival here.

Again, we are not asking for a government handout. All we are asking for is to be able to compete. It is to be able to compete in a fair market, in a free market, on a level playing field. Ultimately, the loser here is going to be the patient. If we allow this to happen and community pharmacies go away, the ones who are going to suffer are going to be the patients.

Thank you again for this. I can't tell you how proud I am of my profession, a profession that I chose years ago when I was in high school and when I was a delivery driver. After I realized I was not going to be the athlete that I wanted to be, I decided it was time to get serious and decide on a profession. I did, and I could not be any prouder than the profession I chose of professional pharmacy. Thank you.

Mr. COLLINS of Georgia. I thank all of my colleagues for coming here tonight.

I am going to go back to where we started: Live your “why.” Live your “why.” That is all we are asking. Our independent pharmacists and our community pharmacists are just simply saying: Let us have an even playing field. We will play with the big boys. We don't care. Just let us have our “why.” When we do that, our benefits come to our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. HUDSON (at the request of Mr. MCCARTHY) for today on account of family reasons.

Mr. PAYNE (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today through October 23 on account of medical procedure.

#### ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

Karen L. Haas, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled a bill of the House of the following title,